

BOOK REVIEWS



Lost Battalions: Going for Broke in the Vosges, Autumn 1944. By Franz Steidl. Presidio Press, 1997. 208 Pages. \$21.95. Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel James H. Willbanks, U.S. Army, Retired, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Lost Battalions is the story of two World War II battalions—one German, one American—each cut off behind enemy lines in the same forest at the same time, and the heroic efforts to save them.

As Allied forces were breaking out and racing across France to the Rhine, few took notice of the U.S. Seventh and French First Armies' sweep up the Rhone Valley in the fall of 1944. This advance, which some called a "cakewalk," certainly looked that way in the beginning, with the rapid advances made following the Riviera landings. But the German Nineteenth Army quickly fortified the Vosges Mountains and made a stand that resulted in one of the hardest fought battles of the war. It was during the course of this largely unknown struggle that the Wehrmacht's 202d Mountain Battalion and the U.S. 141st "Alamo Regiment" of the 36th Texas Division were both encircled by enemy.

During abysmal weather, the 201st Mountain Battalion tried to come to the relief of its beleaguered German comrades. At the same time, only five miles to the north, the heroic 442d Regimental Combat Team, which was composed of Americans of Japanese descent and became the most decorated unit of the U.S. Army, strove valiantly to save the Texans in the bloodiest battle since Anzio. This book describes the bitter and intense fighting over the rugged terrain of the Vosges and focuses on the bravery of American Nisei who had volunteered for service in the U.S. Army, despite the fact that many of their family and friends had been sent to internment camps back home.

Lost Battalions is based on official reports, personal letters, and many interviews with the participants on both sides. It is an extraordinary story of uncommon courage and valor on both sides during what the American soldiers in the battle came to call the "crossroads of hell." It includes very useful photos, maps, and appendices. This

book is an important addition to the scarce literature of the Vosges Campaign and the Seventh Army's attack through southern France.

A History of the American People. By Paul Johnson. HarperCollins, 1998. 1,088 Pages. \$35.00. Reviewed by Dr. Charles E. White, former U.S. Army Infantry School historian.

After decades of liberal lies, America bashing, and political correctness from other writers, renowned British historian Paul Johnson has written the definitive story of our nation. Breathtaking in its scope and depth, *A History of the American People* is a penetrating reinterpretation of our history.

Professor Johnson covers every aspect of American life and tells our story in terms of the ordinary men and women who collectively created our unique character. Not surprisingly, religion plays a decisive role in the development of the American character, as does our English heritage and culture.

Johnson divides his majestic study into eight parts: Colonial America (1580-1750), Revolutionary America (1750-1815), Democratic America (1815-1850), Civil War America (1850-1870), Industrial America (1870-1912), Melting-Pot America (1912-1929), Superpower America (1929-1960), and Problem-Solving, Problem-Creating America (1960-1997). Throughout these sections, Johnson provides an indispensable reevaluation of American history that is firmly grounded on the facts. Every page brings forth his undisguised love and respect for the United States.

What makes this book so valuable is the way Johnson tells America's story. He uses primary source material wherever possible, so that the reader gains a sense of presence, and can judge from the source what really happened. Only then does Johnson provide his interpretation of events. The reader soon discovers that Johnson has tried at all stages to present the facts fully, honestly, and objectively.

This book corrects decades of liberal distortion and is the perfect antidote for the often slanted perspective of textbooks used in our school systems today. Anyone who

loves America and seeks a better understanding of our past should read this book.

Through the Valley: Vietnam, 1967-1968. By James F. Humphries. Lynne Rienner Publishers (1800 30th St., Suite 314, Boulder, CO 80301-1026), 1999. 335 Pages. \$49.95. Reviewed by Dr. Joe P. Dunn, Converse College.

Colonel James Humphries served two tours with the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, in Vietnam. Although he began his first tour as a pay officer for Vietnamese laborers, he seized the first opportunity to command a rifle company. During the very last days of his tour in the field in the Hiep Duc Valley, in June 1968, he sustained a very serious injury and lost his right eye. Nevertheless, he returned to the brigade in 1970-71 to serve as battalion operations officer.

This is his account of his first tour. It is a good combat history that tells the story of a division, the 23d Infantry (Americal) Division, which has not enjoyed one of the most prestigious reputations among Vietnam combat units. Unfortunately, the unduly maligned Americal Division is often remembered for its saddest moments, such as My Lai or the tragedy at Fire Base Mary Ann in 1971. This positive depiction of dutiful and heroic performance in little-reported battles in the northern provinces helps to balance the picture.

Humphries augments his first-person narrative with research conducted at the National Archives and the Center of Military History—after-action reports, lessons learned, intelligence summaries, operational summaries, daily journals, senior officer debriefing reports, oral histories—and correspondence and oral interviews to put the combat in which he participated into larger perspective. Several good military maps included throughout the text help the reader understand the action.

A large number of books fit into this combat narrative genre. This may be one of the better ones in detail and accuracy, and, like all good first-person accounts, it contributes to our understanding of the Vietnam War experience. I do not find it one of the

more interesting narratives, however. Humphries' dispassionate, almost matter-of-fact style, is a bit mechanical and dry. Still, the book is solid and informative and provides good insight into men in battle.

The Pity of War: Explaining World War I. By Niall Ferguson. Basic Books, 1999. 563 Pages. \$30.00. Reviewed by Colonel Christopher B. Timmers, U.S. Army, Retired.

Imagine a country which, as a result of the First World War, effectively lost 22 per cent of its national territory; incurred debts equivalent to 136 per cent of gross national product, a fifth of it owed to foreign powers; saw inflation and then unemployment rise to levels not seen for more than a century; and experienced an equally unprecedented wave of labor unrest....a country whose newly democratic political system produced a system of coalition government in which party deals behind closed doors...determined who governed the country...a country in which the poverty of returning soldiers and their families contrasted grotesquely with the conspicuous consumption of a hedonistic and decadent elite.... The country? Not Germany, but Britain (the territory lost consisted of the 26 counties of Southern Ireland which eventually became the Republic of Ireland we know today).

In this exhaustively researched work, Niall Ferguson gives us World War I from a largely economic viewpoint. He offers statistics in terms of lives lost and property destroyed, but ultimately this is a book that details the human cost of what was to be called the "War to end all wars." *The Pity of War* is the pity of the First World War.

Ferguson sets out to answer 10 questions of his own making from "Was the war inevitable?" (he posits that it was not) to "Who won the peace? or Who ended up paying for the war?" (everyone ended up paying for it and his answer to who won the peace I'll let the reader discover for himself).

He tells us in his introduction that this book is not a narrative of World War I. There are some black-and-white photos of the aftermath of battles, but no maps, no discussion of individual or unit heroics. These items will be found in other texts. What he does show, however, are charts, graphs, and data tables from "Estimate for total public spending as a per cent of Gross National Product for the 5 Great Powers, 1890-1913," to "Enlistment in the British regular army and Territorial Force, August

1914-December 1915." His most interesting data comes largely from economic tables and deals with industrial strengths, national debts, European bond prices, and, finally, the most compelling of all, "The cost of killing: War expenditure and death." By this measure alone, Germany and the Central Powers were the victors. In the expenditure of \$61.5 billion (current outlays) they brought about 5,421,000 Allied deaths. The Allies, on the other hand, spent \$147 billion and killed 4,029,000 enemy. Such stark statistical contrasts, although viewed in context, are present throughout this work.

His argument that World War I could have been prevented, while not necessarily new or flawed, is unremarkable. All wars, we can argue, are preventable. The pity of this war was that a sober analysis of its costs was never undertaken by people whose opinions mattered. Had Ferguson been born two generations earlier and produced this book, one wonders if the cost in human misery of the second World War could have been avoided.

The Civil War in Books: An Analytical Bibliography. University of Illinois Press, 1996. 408 Pages. \$39.95. Reviewed by Major Don Rightmyer, U.S. Air Force, Retired.

Author David Eicher has produced an excellent reference work at a very reasonable price for any reader interested in serious study of the published Civil War history over the past 130 years.

In this book, Eicher has included what he considers the 1,100 most significant books published on the subject (with the assistance of an editorial advisory board composed of John H. Eicher, Gary Gallagher, James M. McPherson, Mark Neely, Jr., Ralph Newman, and James I. Robertson, Jr.) This is the first and best effort of its kind since the publication of the centennial-era *Civil War Books* edited by historians Allan Nevins, James I. Robertson, and Bell Wiley in the 1960s.

Eicher breaks down the books covered into categories of biographies, memoirs, and letters for both the Union and the Confederacy; battles and campaigns; general works; and unit histories. The description of each book contains a succinct description of the subject matter covered and an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, or biases in the book's writing. The volume concludes with both author and title indexes to help in the search for a particular history.

This book is highly recommended to everyone interested in the Civil War. Its

limitations, of course, are that it includes only 1,100 books, but the material provided on each title is far superior to any previous bibliographic works of this kind. *The Civil War in Books* is a worthy investment for any student of the war.

Mantle of Heroism: Tarawa and the Struggle for the Gilberts, November 1943. By Michael B. Graham. Presidio Press, 1997. 360 Pages, 18 Maps. \$17.95, Softbound. Reviewed by Ralph W. Widener, Jr., Dallas, Texas.

On 20 November 1943, Operation *Galvanic*, the code name for the first major American amphibious operation of the war in the Pacific, took place on two very small islands of two different coral atolls in the Gilbert Islands.

Units of the 2d Marine Division were to land on Betio Island, the largest in the Tarawa Atoll. It was the most fortified of all the Gilbert Islands and had an air base on it. Two regiments of the Army's 27th Infantry Division were to land on Butaritari Island, the largest island of the Makin Atoll, which was north of the Tarawa Atoll.

The mission of both divisions was to capture these atolls so that land-based aircraft from fields on them could wear down enemy positions in the Marshall Islands prior to Operation *Flintlock*—the invasion of the Marshalls that was to follow *Galvanic*—and to cooperate with carrier attacks during the initial assault in eliminating Japanese air strength throughout the entire island group. The Army division had very few problems getting ashore on Butaritari Islands, but the same was not true of the Marines.

On D + 1 a force of Marines from the huge fleet submarine *Nautilus* landed on Kenna Island, which was leeward of their intended touchdown point on the Abemama Coral Atoll south of Tarawa. They were members of the V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company whose mission was to scout the atoll and determine whether the Japanese had slipped in any sizable force at the last moment.

One of the problems that worried the Americans was the tides. They had thought the water would be deep enough for their assault craft, drawing three to four feet of water, to maneuver through the reefs to the shore. But a native boy picked up and questioned by Naval Intelligence officers very shortly before the invasion said they could not navigate their way through.

Minutes after the last air and sea bombardment ended on Betio, the Japanese de-

fenders blasted away at the Marines going ashore in their amphibious tractors from positions that the Marines thought had surely been destroyed. Many of the assault boats became stranded on the reefs, and the Marines were forced to walk ashore. Within seconds, tragedy struck the 2d Marine Division.

Graham's book describes some of the most violent combat that took place during World War II, and especially on the island of Betio, where a promised "cake walk" turned into indescribable horror, suffering, and death. Using personal accounts of many of the men he knew, along with official records, the author takes the reader step-by-step through the five days of hell and heroism that it took the Marines to get ashore and eventually to capture the island.

Using stories that capture the valor and sacrifice on the part of the Marines, this book reminds us of what devotion to duty, as well as to one's fellow soldiers and Marines, is all about. It is also good to remember that however sophisticated the weaponry may be, what happens on the ground is often the ultimate guarantee of victory in a combat situation. This was certainly true on Tarawa, and to a lesser degree on Butaritari.

Marines will find this book well worth reading, whether they served in World War II or not. And so will anyone interested in the whole picture of that war.

***Death or Glory: The Legacy of the Crimean War.* By Robert B. Edgerton. Westview Press, 1999. 288 Pages. \$30.00.** Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Harold E. Raugh, Jr., U.S. Army, Retired.

The Crimean War of 1853-1856 was the largest and deadliest European conflict fought between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I. It was notorious for its incompetent and aged leaders, extremely ineffective logistics and medical capabilities, and acts of astonishing bravery and brutality.

Numerous studies, narratives, personal reminiscences, and other accounts have been written about the Crimean War. Author Robert B. Edgerton, professor of anthropology and psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, has woven together various vignettes and anecdotes from these accounts to try to show how one's culture influences the way war is experienced. The activities, perceptions, and experiences of many of the leading participants—British, French, Turkish, Sardinian, and Russian—are highlighted and compared (although somewhat superficially, in some cases) with

the experiences of Northern and Southern soldiers during the American Civil War, which began a few years later.

The Crimean War witnessed the introduction of mass-produced rifles, railroads, and steam-driven warships. It was an early conflict that involved relatively modern technology, and as such was a precursor of the American Civil War. It was also the first war in which newspaper correspondents could telegraph their stories directly from the battlefield. The author frequently conveys the same sense of immediacy as he recounts soldiers' tales of their gallantry as well as their fears, privations, and suffering.

The author approaches his subject topically, first providing the diplomatic and historical context of the war, followed by an overview of the characteristics of the participating armies. "Butchered Leadership" comes next, followed by logistical and medical aspects of the war and the role of women and children in the conflict. A chapter is devoted to the frequently misunderstood and maligned Turks. The apparent motivation of soldiers is present, and their experiences are analyzed. What is well-known by combat arms soldiers, regardless of "cultural differences," is that for men at war "nothing matters to them as much as doing well in the eyes of their closest comrades."

Death or Glory—primarily through the first-hand accounts of participating soldiers, journalists and others—provides a window through which the reader can see the reality of war in the Crimea a century and a half ago. The Crimean War was unusually harsh and horrible, and it is good to be reminded that war is hell and wears a human face.

***A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens.* By Lawrence E. Babits. University of North Carolina Press, 1998. 231 Pages. \$39.95.** Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Albert N. Garland, U.S. Army, Retired.

The battle between Brigadier General Daniel Morgan's combined Continental-militia American force and Colonel Banastre Tarleton's largely regular British one on 17 January 1781 at the Cowpens, a crossroads in South Carolina, was neither the largest nor the longest battle fought during the Revolution.

Morgan deployed about 1,600 men (suffering between 127 and 148 casualties) while Tarleton sent about 1,250 infantrymen, cavalymen, and artillerymen against his foe. Tarleton, the loser, left behind some 800 soldiers, dead (100), wounded (200),

and prisoners (500). All of this carnage occurred in approximately 40 minutes of actual battle, during what the author, Lawrence E. Babits, claims "was the finest American tactical demonstration of the war."

Babits is an associate professor of maritime history and nautical archaeology at East Carolina University. But don't let his academic title bother you, as it did me when I first read it. Babits served on active duty between November 1963 and March 1966 with Company B, 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, thereby getting a good feel for the life of a fighting soldier, both in garrison and in the field.

He then served from 1967 to 1984 as "a member of the First Maryland Regiment, a group portraying the Revolutionary War Continental soldier." This experience gave him invaluable background when he undertook to write about a Revolutionary War battle that has not been well presented by previous authors. The Cowpens may have been a smallish battle but one that Babits believes had a tremendous effect on the British Army operating in the Southern colonies and "helped lead to the Yorktown surrender." In my opinion, Babits has produced one of the better battle books I have ever had the pleasure of reading.

Babits believed a new study of the battle, and of the events leading to it, particularly the British approach march and its physical and mental effects on Tarleton's men, was "necessary because...no author used all published sources or attempted to resolve differences of chronology and tactics" while "most recent writers tend to present the southern campaign within a broader context" and Cowpens, therefore, "becomes only a small segment of a campaign."

After a well-written and informative introductory chapter that sets the stage for the battle itself, Babits follows with chapters on battlefield tactics at the small-unit level, including individual weapon employment, organizational pictures of the unit involved (in narrative form, of course), and excellent word pictures of the unit commanders on both sides. Photographs of the top commanders are also included in this chapter.

He follows these with chapters on the events that led to the clash, Morgan's defensive positions and his intentions as to how he would fight the battle, the battle itself as it moved from one American line to another, the cavalry actions, and the aftermath and results. Babits believes the "details of Morgan's tactical plan have not been appreciated because most writers omit discussion of his sophisticated, unconventional, main-

line deployment, as well as the reverse slope defense."

Babits does all of this in just 161 narrative pages, which includes 19 maps, 6 photographs, and 9 tables and figures. The remaining 70 pages are given over to chapter notes, a detailed bibliography, and a proper index. I should also mention that Babits has made a detailed terrain walk of the battleground.

Revolutionary War buffs and military historians interested in the actions of men in battle should get a copy of this book. It is not cheap; few university press books, on an initial printing, are ever in that category unless they appear in softcover format. But this book is worth the money.

***Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967.* By George L. MacGarrigle. U. S. Army Center of Military History, 1998. (Superintendent of Documents, GPO S/N 008-029-00339-2). 485 Pages. \$44.00. Reviewed by Dr. Joe P. Dunn, Converse College.**

The seventh volume to appear in the Center of Military History's comprehensive history of the U.S. Army in the Vietnam War, this is the first volume of the combat histories. By October 1955, the American troop buildup in Vietnam, which had begun 18 months earlier, had reached a point where General William C. Westmoreland believed that the U.S. could move from simply defending South Vietnam to undertaking the offensive initiative. Westmoreland knew that task would not be short or simple. The long war of attrition would test the Army's capabilities and America's commitment "to stay the course." The North Vietnamese also understood the situation and stepped up their infiltration to raise the stakes in the conflict. During this decisive year, combat operations against North Vietnamese main force units increasingly became a central element of the war.

The book begins by describing the challenges that Westmoreland faced in late 1966 as he launched the U.S. offensive, and it discusses the enemy's strategy to counteract American actions. MacGarrigle then traces in extensive detail the military actions in all parts of the country, area by area, unit by unit. His basic sources are the unit records, including command reports, the Operational Reports-Lessons Learned quarterly summaries, unit daily journals and logs, and after-action reports. The author admits that these sources varied greatly in quality. Many are so vague as to be useless, and most were subject to the all-too-common problem in

Vietnam of exaggerating achievements and obscuring failures. He also employs numerous oral interviews, both those in the collection of the Center of Military History and the more than 50 that he conducted personally. The solid, readable narrative is supported by 45 color maps, which are invaluable, and by numerous pictures in both black-and-white and color.

The final chapter is a balanced assessment of the accomplishments and failures of the year. Westmoreland was optimistic in November 1967. The achievements, statistically and empirically, were impressive. But success was not uniform throughout the country. Indeed the situation in I Corps, which would soon become the focus of the American nation's attention, was bleak. And the costs of success had been high with 8,237 Americans killed between October 1966 and September 1967, greatly exceeding the 4,737 killed between 1961 and October 1966.

For this reason and others, on the home-front American patience with the war was very thin. Equally important, the great casualties suffered by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese during the year had not dampened their resolve or optimism as they prepared to up the ante in confronting the U.S. military in a toe-to-toe slugfest. Westmoreland was confident that his strategy would be successful over the long term. But by the end of 1967, the clock was ticking on long-term strategies. In the author's concluding words, "The U.S. Army in Vietnam was running out of time."

Although one could wish for a little more critical assessment of the failures of both strategy and tactical operations, this is a very fine book that adds considerably to our detailed knowledge of the fighting of the war. I look forward to the forthcoming combat operations histories.

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

***Digital War: A View from the Front Lines.* Edited by Robert L. Bateman, III. Presidio, 1999. 256 Pages. \$29.95, Hardcover.**

***Battle for Mortain: The 30th Infantry Division Saves the Breakout, August 7-12, 1944.* By Alwyn Featherston. Originally published in 1993. Presidio, 1998. 304 Pages. \$16.95, Softbound.**

***Chancellorsville.* By Stephen W. Sears. Originally published in 1996. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 593 Pages. \$16.00, Softbound.**

***The Secret War for the Union: The Untold History of Military Intelligence in the Civil War.* By Edwin C. Fishel. Originally published in 1996. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 734 Pages. \$16.00, Softbound.**

***Thunder Along the Mississippi: The River Battles That Split the Confederacy.* By Jack D. Coombe. Originally published in 1996. Ban-**

tam, 1998. 272 Pages. \$12.95, Softbound.

***The Fighting Fortieth in War and Peace.* By James D. Delk. ETC Publications (700 East Vereda del Sur, Palm Springs, CA 92262-4816), 1998. 436 Pages. \$29.95.**

***The Official United States Naval Academy Workout.* Researched by Andrew Flach. Hatherleigh Press, 1998. 128 Pages. \$14.95.**

***Soldiers Under Three Flags: The Exploits of Special Forces Captain Larry A. Thorne.* By H.A. Gill, III. Pathfinder Publishing, 1998. 208 Pages. \$14.95, Softbound.**

***Neptunus Rex: Naval Stories of the Normandy Invasion, June 6, 1944.* Edited by Edward F. Prados. Presidio, 1998. 320 Pages. \$24.95.**

***The Black Sheep: The Definitive Account of Marine Fighting Squadron 214 in World War II.* By Bruce Gamble. Presidio, 1998. 496 Pages. \$28.95.**

***Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power.* By Anatol Lieven. Yale University Press, 1998. 436 Pages. \$35.00.**

***Where the Hell Are the Guns? A Soldier's Eye View of the Anxious Years, 1939-1944.* By George G. Blackburn. McClelland & Stewart (481 University Avenue, Suite 900, Toronto, Ontario, M5G 2E9), 1998. 384 Pages. \$34.99.**

***In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army.* By Edward J. Drea. University of Nebraska Press, 1998. 300 Pages. \$45.00.**

***The World's Sniping Rifles. A Greenhill Military Manual.* By Ian V. Hogg. Stackpole, 1998. 144 Pages. \$22.95.**

***The Army Times, Navy Times, Air Force Times Encyclopedia of Modern U.S. Military Weapons.* By Colonel Timothy M. Laur and Steven L. Llanso. Edited by Walter J. Boyne. Berkley, 1998. 496 Pages. \$19.95.**

***To Fool a Glass Eye: Camouflage versus Photoreconnaissance in World War II.* By Roy M. Stanley II. Smithsonian, 1998. 192 Pages. \$37.95.**

***Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam.* By Karen Gottschang, with Phan Thanh Hao. John Wiley, 1998. 224 Pages. \$24.95.**

***Hard to Forget: An American with the Mobile Guerrilla Force in Vietnam.* By Steven M. Yedinak. Ivy, 1998. 276 Pages. \$6.99, Softbound.**

***Chemical-Biological Defense: U.S. Military Policies and Decisions in the Gulf War.* By Albert J. Mauroni. Praeger, 1998. 280 Pages. \$59.95.**

***You Can't Fight Tanks with Bayonets: Psychological Warfare against the Japanese Army in the Southwest Pacific.* By Allison B. Gilmore. University of Nebraska Press, 1998. 244 Pages. \$45.00.**

***Combat Swimmer: Memoirs of a Navy Seal.* By Captain Robert Gormly, U.S.N., Retired. Dutton, 1998. 439 Pages. \$23.95.**

***General Stand Watie's Confederate Indians.* By Frank Cunningham. Originally published by Naylor Press, 1959. University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. 252 Pages. \$14.95, Softbound.**

***Son Thang.* By Gary Solis. Hardcover published by Naval Institute Press, 1997. Bantam, 1998. 390 Pages. \$6.50.**